



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **May 7, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Ann E. Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Sandra Rudnick  
Stacey Savelle  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Hon. Joyce Fahey  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Wendy L. Ramallo  
Adelina Sorkin

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the May 7, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the April 16, 2007, general meeting were unanimously approved.

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- Executive Assistant Elizabeth Hinton has left the Commission office to take a position with the Department of Health Services. Vice Chair Rudnick expressed appreciation to the Executive Office for its assistance in finding a temporary replacement for Ms. Hinton in order to assist during the transition. A farewell card was circulated for signatures, and a thank-you gift for her years of service is being planned.
- Vice Chair Rudnick introduced and welcomed a new Commissioner Stacey Savelle, an appointee of Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, who has extensive experience in the Department of Children and Family Services.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- Director Trish Ploehn introduced her new Executive Assistant, Norma Dreger, who has spent the last 21 years with DCFS as a Children's Social Worker, Supervisor, and Acting Assistant Regional Administrator. Leader, Ms. Ploehn looks forward to Ms. Dreger's help in addressing quality-of-life issues for the children under DCFS care.
- The invitations for June 6's Celebration 07, for DCFS youth graduating from high school, have been mailed.
- DCFS has authorized its full support for AB 298, legislation that would give legal guardianship with relatives priority over adoption by nonrelated persons. As a permanent plan Ms. Ploehn reported that research shows that relative guardianships are at least as stable as nonrelative adoptions, if not more so, and the bill has received backing from across the state. It was approved by the Assembly on April 24, 2007 and has now gone to the Appropriations Committee.

**Commissioner Williams moved that the Commission write to the Board of Supervisors urging its formal support for AB 298. Commissioner Biondi seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

- Since its inception, the Permanency Partners Program (P3) has served 1,426 youth age 12 and above. Of these, 107 have returned to their families or are in the process of doing so, 198 are in or have completed adoptive planning, and 229 have entered into legal guardianships or are close to doing so. The principles of the P3 program, Ms. Ploehn said, should be a way of doing business for the department, especially at the front end of the system, so that children do not grow up in short-term foster care but in permanent loving homes.
- To address the backlog of Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) assessments of relative and foster homes, the Board of Supervisors has ordered a Proposition "A" analysis to be performed by the Auditor-Controller's office to determine the cost effectiveness in contracting with an outside organization rather than assigning them to Children's Social Workers. The Auditor-Controller's report should be heard by the Board next Tuesday, and Ms. Ploehn hopes to have a copy to share with the

Commission prior to that time. A fuller presentation on this issue will be made at the Commission's May 21 meeting.

Commissioner Williams expressed concern about the "badly flawed" ASFA process, with relatives having been mistreated and disrespected for years. Commissioner Williams expressed strongly her concerns about the possibility of outsiders with no social work training entering those same relatives' homes to again insult and disrespect them. She further stated that relatives are the County's biggest asset in its care of abused and neglected children, taking in more than half the children who are removed from their parents. Commissioners agreed to consider a motion at the May 21, 2007 meeting to send a letter to the Board of Supervisors indicating strong opposition to the idea of an outside contractor usurping ASFA assessments.

- Because DCFS has been behind in its ASFA assessments, county funds—rather than State and Federal are drawn-down for paying relatives. Ms. Ploehn hopes that the backlog will be cleared up by June 30, 2007 in time for the July 1, 2007 Title IV- E Waiver Implementation. The waiver will allow a focus on support for relative caregivers, and community meetings are already identifying a need for help with children's mental health needs. Dr. Charles Sophy has convened a work group to engage caregivers and get an idea of their issues, which include building relationships with mental health providers, and whether a new component in the DCFS academy, 'All Our Kin,' will provide sufficient training for social workers in supporting the needs of relatives.
- Through enhancements to Kin-GAP (Kinship Guardian Assistance Payments), 7,571 additional clothing allotments were issued on April 16, 2007. Retroactive payments to October 2006 have also been issued for 100 D and F rate children who left the system over the last year, opting to take the B rate while Kin-GAP Plus was being finalized.
- In response to a Board of Supervisors motion on using state augmentation monies for human services aides, DCFS has identified nine strategies for strengthening the ability of Children's Social Worker Trainees to serve children and families.
  - ✓ Targeted recruitment, especially in areas like the Antelope Valley where candidates are few
  - ✓ A more realistic job preview, so candidates can make informed decisions for employment.
  - ✓ An improved selection process (a test of writing skills has been added, for example, which is eliminating 40 percent of candidates; a third component, for temperament, has been added to the psychological exam)
  - ✓ New training for raters in the interview process, to ensure consistency

- ✓ Dropping the term ‘trainee’ from the job classification so that workers are not ‘training on’ children and families, but serving them
  - ✓ Removing contract language about assigning trainees ‘less difficult’ cases (those are now being diverted to community providers and kept out of the system, and the complexity of any given case is virtually impossible to assess up front)
  - ✓ Allowing volunteer service, not just paid employment, to count as job experience
  - ✓ A passport portfolio that will follow an employee from the training academy, enhancing communication between the classroom and the field
- After the presentation by grandparent caregivers William and Sandra Stinson at April 2, 2007 meeting, Commissioners asked about the information provided to individuals at the first hint they might be asked to provide care for relative children. A packet has recently been developed—the ASFA Section of the Kinship Support Division—that includes copies of standards and regulations for foster homes, personal rights for children and caregivers, information on DCFS’s kinship support division and its support centers, and the legal and financial differences between adoption and guardianship. The new packet also includes a letter from DCFS asking the Department of Public Social Services to give the family priority in any DPSS program applications. (Ms. Ploehn expects the last not to be a major issue in future, since once ASFA assessments are performed in a timely manner, DCFS financing should go through without delay.)

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton commended DCFS on developing the packets and asked if the Commission could be forward a copy. Ms. Ploehn stated she will make the packet available to the Commission office, and said that its use will be mandatory for emergency response workers in the daytime and for command post staff at night. It has been translated into Spanish, and she believes that translations into other languages are also being planned.

- In referring to a chart provided by Lisa Parrish’s section, Commissioner Biondi asked DCFS—because July’s waiver implementation affects both it and the Probation Department—to begin including statistics about Probation’s suitable placements in all data reports. She also questioned the out-of-home placement statistics for the year ending April 2007, and Vice Chair Rudnick suggested that Lisa Parrish make a presentation to explain them fully. Executive Director, Kim Foster, clarified for the Commission the document Commissioner Biondi was referring to was not part of the Commission Meeting for today’s meeting.
- To help remind Commissioners of the various pieces of information they have receive at Commissioner Worthy-Clayton asked Ms. Ploehn’s if she could be presented reports/data to the Commission in writing for future meetings.

### **CHILD FATALITY COMMITTEE REPORT –**

Commissioner Friedman report to the Commission that in September of last year, a 15-year-old was shot outside of Birmingham High School. When Commissioner Friedman asked if the boy was under the supervision of DCFS, she was told that the entire Commission would have to vote to ask that question. The following day, however, the *Daily News* reported that the boy was indeed involved with the department. Commissioner Friedman expressed concern as to why the information was available to the media but not to Commissioners?

Commissioner Friedman believes that incident is emblematic of the larger systemic problems that make reviewing child fatalities so difficult. Timeliness is one major issue: the coroner's office did not finalize its child-death report for 2004 until this year, for instance, and DCFS has released no 30-day reports yet on serious incidents in 2007. Record-keeping can also be spotty, and in some cases contradictory. When Paul Buehler took over the DCFS risk management division in February, he made available to Commissioner Friedman the log of child deaths, which in many instances failed to match the brief initial reports, filed by children's social workers in the regional offices, that Commissioners receive.

Of the 49 cases mentioned in the log, almost a third were gang-related shootings of children involved with DCFS at the time of their death or in the past. Another group of deaths related to co-sleeping, where an infant was rolled on or suffocated. In some traditions, co-sleeping is a cultural norm, and Ms. Ploehn has approached the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) about a safe-sleeping media campaign. Commissioner Biondi also mentioned a Commission investigation of this issue some years back which found that when a baby dies in bed, the parent is almost always using some kind of intoxicant, suggesting that might be included in the campaign.

Commissioner Friedman made three recommendations:

- Serious incident information must be received by Commissioners promptly, not in batches every three months.
- Commissioners should receive all 30-day and 90-day reports, which should also be produced in a timely fashion.
- To ensure that other sets of eyes are reviewing these reports, DCFS should attend and bring cases to the monthly multidisciplinary meetings held by ICAN. The Commission should also send a representative.

Commissioner Friedman says the late reports should be available in two weeks per Paul Buehler (DCFS). Commissioner Worthy-Clayton further requested that Commissioners receive copies of all DCFS reports to ICAN, plus monthly updates to the child fatality log. Ms. Ploehn stated she will research those matters and report back, and will also ask Paul Buehler to present to the Commission.

### **SERVICE AREA NAVIGATORS (MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT)**

Debbie Innes-Gomberg is the Department of Mental Health's District Chief in charge of implementing the Mental Health Services Act, which is currently funding community services and supports for children, transition-age youth (TAY), adults, and older adults. In the MHSA planning stages, a 'no wrong door' approach was envisioned for accessing mental health services, which involved two concepts:

- Engaging the community and bringing together a network of providers to support clients and their families
- Ensuring local authority so the needs of specific service areas can be met

Dr. Kara Taguchi is the Countywide lead for the service area Navigator Teams that help individuals access services by assessing their mental health needs, linking them to services, and following up to ensure that connections are made. Because of a recently lifted hiring freeze and difficulties in recruiting qualified social workers, the program has ramped up slowly. Of the 23 systems navigators hired across the county, 13 specifically serve children in teams that consist of a licensed clinical social worker (or someone close to earning that license), a mental health services coordinator (at the masters level), a community worker or parent advocate, and clerical support. Each team is fluent in English and Spanish, and many speak other languages as well. Teams are housed in the community, at DMH administrative offices and other buildings, the former MacLaren Children's Center, and mental health clinics.

As of late April, Service Area Navigators had referred 1,100 clients to full-service partnerships and another 400 to 500 clients to other mental health programs. Teams in each SPA work with full-service partnership providers, DCFS, Probation, the school districts, law enforcement, and other community partners, building relationships and concentrating particularly on clients new to the mental health system.

To accomplish the MHSA-mandated evaluation, Dr. Taguchi is collecting information from the service area navigators as a first step in drafting a proposal for outcomes to be regularly collected by the teams. Likely components include counting the number of successful referrals and in some way measuring the community engagement piece, and Dr. Taguchi is working with the 10 Service Area District Chiefs to develop standardized quarterly reports to the state. Dr. Innes-Gomberg promised to share the draft outcomes proposal with the Commission upon its completion.

Recruiting staff in the Antelope Valley (SPA 1) is not easy, even though it is an area with numerous unmet mental health needs. (Many children there qualify under DCFS's enhanced specialized foster care provisions, and DMH is trying to link with co-located staff.) The area's unique geographic challenges include transportation, which is covered by full-service partnerships and can be provided by service area navigators as well. At Commissioner Williams' recommendation, Ms. Innes-Gomberg will suggest that her deputy director consider extra stipends—mileage for employees, for example, or other perks—that might help DMH address barriers to recruitment there. Kathy House from the CAO's office indicated she made note of the hiring challenges.

## **TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH (TAY) NAVIGATION TEAMS (MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT)**

Terri Boykins, Division Chief of the DMH Transition-Age Youth (TAY) Division, distributed job descriptions for TAY systems navigators and housing specialists, a deployment update for the TAY systems navigation teams, three client case studies, and staff contact information. The new division, fully funded by the MHSA, provides intensive case management for youth age 16 to 25 with unserved or underserved mental health needs. Systems navigation teams consist of both a psychiatric social worker and a housing specialist, since securing permanent housing for severely emotionally disturbed youth can be a daunting element in their treatment. Teams locate youth through drop-in centers, shelters, the juvenile justice system, and adult jails, and also receive referrals from multiple county departments and private citizens.

The youth with the highest needs are usually in their early twenties, homeless or at risk of homelessness, with no resources and little capacity to navigate the system on their own. They are often referred to full-service partnerships, and navigators pride themselves on linking to services even those for whom that program is not appropriate, leveraging housing and other benefits from community and public resources.

The division's operating plan calls for 26 staff—18 systems navigators and eight housing specialists—five of whom will be deployed in probation camp programs. The balance are to be assigned in service areas, either in a specific SPA or as 'floaters.' To date, three systems navigators and five housing specialists have been hired, along with a supervising psychiatric social worker, and are working in SPAs 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8. As of next month, teams should be moving into SPAs 1, 6, and 7 and into the probation camps, where navigators will enhance existing aftercare programs and make sure that needed services are ready for youth leaving camp. (The probation camp piece required separate permission from the state to use MHSA funds in locked facilities, and Los Angeles County may be the only entity using those monies there. At Commissioner Biondi's request, Ms. Boykins promised a copy of the final plan for the camp-based arm of the program.)

The TAY division modeled its cross-cutting process on the emancipation partnership program, co-locating its centralized management team with independent living program (ILP) coordinators from Probation and DCFS to ensure collaboration. Cross-training and the recruitment of qualified staff continue to be hurdles, and Sandra Turner said that the Board of Supervisors will soon be asked to approve more positions, three of them at Camp Rockey, linked to a recent state grant through the Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction Act (MIOPRA).

Commissioner Biondi inquired about showing of information with and between DCFS for tracking purpose as to whether or not client youth have previously been involved in the dependency or delinquency systems—something captured in the history done as part of the full-service partnership work-up—will be important to both DCFS and Probation, Commissioner Biondi said, and Ms. Boykins reported that data outside the outcome application is also being tracked. She was also aware of the updated list of housing

possibilities, not all requiring youth to be ILP-eligible that is available from Probation. Ms. Boykin's will follow-up.

**SERVICE AREA NAVIGATORS (ENHANCED SPECIALIZED FOSTER CARE/ KATIE A.)**

DMH's Sandra Thomas explained that the systems navigators for enhanced specialized foster care function in much the same way as the MHSA-funded service area navigators, improving access to mental health services for children already in the foster-care system and those newly detained. Teams consist of a psychiatric social worker and a medical case worker who provide consultation to children's social workers and foster families, and serve on the D rate case management team. Managers provide regular reports to the Katie A. panel, which is monitoring the county's compliance with the settlement of that lawsuit. Ms. Turner presented a chart of the various services provided in SPAs 1, 6, and 7 as of March 2007, and noted that countywide systems navigators are co-located in 13 of the 18 DCFS regional offices. Both basic mental health services and intensive in-home services are funded through the Katie A. joint plan, and DMH is nearing the end of its Request for Services process for in-home providers; it hopes to enroll clients this August.

The D rate case management unit, in operation for the past two years, has also received additional funding for enhanced specialized foster care; its systems navigation piece supports children, families, foster families, and children's social workers involved in D rate cases. Because D rate children are nearly always already linked to mental health services, the unit employs medical case workers only. Every six months, a D rate reassessment review is done for each case, which includes a team decision-making conference and a nurse's review of the child's psychotropic medication authorization (if appropriate) a month before.

At Vice Chair Rudnick's request, Ms. Thomas to return to the Commission with a simplified chart of services provided by the service area navigators, including definitions of terms (the difference between screening and assessment, for instance), the numbers of children referred, the numbers of children assessed, and the numbers of children receiving various services.

In the interests of time, the Casey Family Programs presentation on the California strategies planning meeting was postponed to another meeting, and Vice Chair Rudnick apologized to presenters for the delay. Yakiciwey asked that copies of the chart be destroyed as the document is still a "draft" and not ready for distribution.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**